

Business Owners Need to be Aware of Phony Fire Inspectors

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Fire Chief Daryl Osby advises business owners and employees to be on the lookout for phony “fire inspectors.”

Businesses throughout Los Angeles County and across the state have been targeted by scam artists who wear official-looking “uniforms” and perform questionable “fire safety inspections” in local businesses. These individuals typically enter businesses suggesting that they represent the fire department and state that “they need to inspect the fire protection system,” or that “they need to inspect various components of the fire protection system.” These components can include alarms, fire sprinklers, hood systems, and fire extinguishers. Oftentimes, these “inspectors” ask an unsuspecting employee to sign a form authorizing the inspections. Several weeks, or months, after these fraudulent inspections are completed, business owners often receive an invoice for various services that were fraudulently performed.

The County of Los Angeles Fire Department inspects businesses annually and **does not charge for these inspections**. Business owners, managers, and employees should not let anyone inspect their fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems, hood systems, or any other protection devices unless they have an agreement with a specific fire protection company.

Business owners should ensure that any fire inspection that is completed at their business is legitimate. This can be accomplished by following four simple steps.

1. Inspectors should introduce themselves as County of Los Angeles Fire Department employees or identify their business and produce a business card. Allowing an individual to enter your business without a clear understanding of who that person is, as well as their intentions, is not recommended.
2. Inspectors should be able to present a copy of their current County or City business license. Legitimate contractors should have a “C-10” endorsement to inspect fire alarms or a “C-16” endorsement to inspect fire sprinklers and fix fire protection systems. Licenses can be verified by checking with the Contractor’s State License Board at <http://www.cslb.ca.gov>.
3. Inspectors should be able to tell you what they intend to do and what the estimated costs will be. Never pay in cash. Invoicing and recordkeeping are important for your business and help assist in establishing future legal avenues if the inspection turns out to be fraudulent.
4. Inspectors must leave any broken and/or replaced parts with you. They also must provide a signed invoice.

Remember! You may always refuse service and contact the County of Los Angeles Fire Department for guidance. We will gladly advise you of any required service schedules for your fire protection systems and assist you in verifying that the company you choose is qualified to provide the appropriate inspection, testing, and maintenance.

If you suspect suspicious activity, contact law enforcement, your municipal fire department or the County of Los Angeles Fire Department’s Public Affairs Section at (323) 881-2411.